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ABSTRACT

The beliefs of teachers with respect to open education are discussed. The point is made that a teacher who expresses a desire to move toward an open classroom environment must first come to trust beliefs and values that may be alien to her own beliefs and must learn to value the following ideas: (1) The life of a child in school is not a preparation for the future; to live like a child is the best preparation; (2) Knowledge is a personal synthesis of one's own experiences and learning proceeds along many intersecting paths; and (3) There is no set body of knowledge that must be transmitted to all. In order to clarify some of the beliefs toward an open approach to teaching, the following steps are recommended: (1) an interview with teachers intended to determine their beliefs about certain aspects of teaching behavior, (2) systematic observation of teaching behavior within the natural school environment, and (3) a synthesis of the interview data with the observation data in order to make some inferences concerning the relationship between what teachers say and what they do. (Author/CK)

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TEACHER BELIEFS AND OPEN EDUCATION*

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Anyone reasonably versed in the history and sociology of education realizes that the schools are now "and always have been, reflections of class structure, which they have reinforced rather than served" (Katz, 1971). The classroom, as a subcultural unit of the larger society, has been used as a vehicle for the transmission of these beliefs. The classroom teacher has certain values as a result of her life span experiences and learnings. She must learn to cope with the basic values in the curriculum, the possibly divergent values of the children, the institutional values of the school and her own beliefs about children and learning.

Teachers make decisions regarding curriculum selection or development. They decide what they perceive to be appropriate instructional techniques and what learnings are to be emphasized. The teacher is also responsible for the establishment of the classroom environment. Teachers are decision makers. Even when decisions are limited or completely directed by specific curriculum packages, the teacher must ultimately implement the package. How she implements it is still dependent on her perceptions of the material. These perceptions often result in "significant differences among the instructional activities of teachers within specific instructional programs or curriculum materials package" (Rosenshine, 1971).

The values a teacher holds do make a difference in the way she organizes her classroom, the way in which she operates it and the way in which she interacts with children (Wolfson, 1967). In a recent presentation, Chittendon and Bussis (1971) also imply that the way a teacher behaves in her classroom, her methods, will be affected by her beliefs about what she holds to be important and unimportant. They state that the belief systems of teachers become "intervening processes between the philosophy a teacher may espouse and what she actually does."

Teacher beliefs about children and learning are deeply ingrained, deeply rooted, buttressed by knowledge, observation and experience. They are not acquired quickly. They are developed by a process of interactions which are complex and find expression in all aspects of teacher behavior (Combs, 1965).

Beliefs and Openness

A teacher who expresses a desire to move toward an open classroom environment must first come to trust beliefs and values that may be alien to her own beliefs. The implications of these new beliefs necessitate classroom behavior which may be different from the behaviors which these teachers exhibit. In moving toward openness, some of the beliefs which a teacher must learn to value are: (1) the life of a child in school is not a preparation for the future; to live like a child is the best preparation, (2) knowledge is a personal synthesis of one's own experiences and learning proceeds along many intersecting paths, (3) there is no set body of knowledge that must be transmitted to all (Walberg, 1971). The process of implementing these and other beliefs in the open classroom must be taken seriously since they ultimately influence the structure of a teacher's role and guide her relationships with children.

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The extent to which institutional values effect the open education teacher is a question which also deserves attention. The framework of beliefs necessary for teacher behavior in an open classroom may be antagonistic to institutional values and beliefs. The teachers that we have been working with seem to be moving toward openness in their classrooms. In some instances this movement has been encouraged by corresponding changes in institutional values. One minor example is that the halls and other previous verboten portions of the school are now viewed as legitimate places for learning activities. In other instances, change toward openness seems to be occurring with no visible change in institutional values. There seems to be degrees of change toward openness in both types of situations. What is also occurring is movement toward openness irrespective of any institutional change. The crucial factor in a move toward open teaching is the beliefs of the individual teachers.

Beliefs and Behavior

What the teacher does is the most vital link in the process of educational transactions. Teacher behavior has been and will continue to be the concern of teacher educators, teacher trainers, researchers and teachers. However, in contrast to other behavioral characterizations or descriptions of teaching, teachers in the open classroom are encouraged to develop a style of teaching which is idiosyncratic, a style which is particular to their classrooms and its inhabitants. Within this idiosyncratic framework, the task of open teachers is to match their behavior with their beliefs about children and learning. They also need assistance in broadening their repertoire of teaching skills and support in "training" their behavior.

I have used the terms values and beliefs synonomously because they are interrelated, and the boundaries between them cannot be clearly drawn. Ultimately they merge into a total system which provides a frame of reference for behavior. Values and beliefs are dynamic. They are subject to growth and modification and in turn effect each other (Rokeach, 1968; Blackmon, 1968). There is also some evidence to suggest the notion of a relationship of the components of a teacher's belief system and their behaviors in the classroom. These behaviors are recognized to be overt manifestations of a teacher's belief system (Harvey, et al., 1961; Kerlinger and Pedhazur, 1967; Loree, 1971).

Conceptualizing Movement Toward Openness

Bussis and Chittenden (1970) present a two-dimensional configuration of classroom environments which seems to be a useful scheme for conceptualizing several relationships. The extent to which the individual teacher and the individual child contribute to the learning process is represented by vertical and horizontal arrows. Figure 1 represents their framework. The descriptive phrases in each quadrant have been abstracted from their text and provide representative statements which presumably associated with each teaching environment.

Insert Figure 1 about here

In each of the quadrants are placed various components of belief systems. These components, based on previous studies, seem to correspond to the descriptive phrases of each classroom environment. That each teacher has a distinctive set of beliefs that are available for empirical scrutiny may be implied from Figure 1. That each quadrant can be characterized by an appropriate or corresponding set of beliefs may also be implied. This conception should serve

HIGH

CONTRIBUTION

OF CHILD

LOW

LOW ← CONTRIBUTION → HIGH

OF TEACHER

Laissez-Faire Description
- adult plays supportive but entirely non-directive role
- children have a great deal of freedom
- adult passively accepts the curriculum
- adult avoids expressing personal preference or direct suggestions
- emphasis is on nurturance rather than education

Associated Laissez-Faire Beliefs
- conceived values
- progressive attitudes
- system 3 teacher

Open Education Description
- adult understands and fosters sensitivity to the nature of the material
- classroom environment reflects teacher and child interests
- children are engaged in activities which they find valuable and interesting
- children are related to in the context of their interest
- teacher serves as a resource person
- teacher looks to the materials and a diagnosis is made about success and failure in terms of the suitability of the materials, plus alternative uses
- teacher shares ideas about children and learning
- total life of child is relevant to classroom learning
- teacher is viewed as important part of the learning process and as a dynamic person
- teacher respects children, is honest in her encounters with them and her peers
- teacher recognizes the emotions of the children differentially and acts as a stabilizing and reassuring influence

Associated Open Education Beliefs
- conceived values
- progressive attitudes
- system 4 teacher

Sneaky Telling Description
- teacher is imaginative
- teacher uses creative material with discovery method
- integrated day teacher
- emphasis is on children's need to understand rather than to construct
- external objectives of the lesson are clearly established
- teacher may understand what she is doing and goal to be reached, but little is at her own invention

Associated Sneaky Telling Beliefs
- conceived values
- semi-progressive attitudes
- system 3 teacher

Programmed Instruction Description
- adult is passive conveyor of decisions made elsewhere
- adult accepts packaged teaching material
- education is preparation for life rather than life itself
- children have little to say in determining a goal for themselves

Associated Programmed Instruction Beliefs
- operative values
- traditional attitudes
- system 1 teacher

Traditional British Description
- children have little to say
- adult very active in diagnosis making it her business to know what's going on
- strong adult who may be remembered with anger or fondness
- does it her own way, makes own decisions with or without help from curriculum material
- little credit or decision making on part of students

Associated Traditional British Beliefs
- object values
- traditional attitudes
- system 2 teacher

FIGURE 1

Values from Morris; attitudes from Kerlinger and Pedhazur; system teachers from Harvey et al. (see Bibliography)

as a useful technique for assessing change in the classroom. As the beliefs of teachers are changed or modified, the change toward openness in a classroom environment may be clarified. This clarification might be indicated by an alignment of the hypothesized associated beliefs with the descriptive statements of a classroom environment.

Individuals in the same society do not share identical beliefs (Kluckhohn, 1954). Studies which attempt to isolate or identify specific attitudes and values have had varying degrees of success. In a study by Wehling there was "a high degree of instability in the factor structure of the domain (beliefs) [they] were exploring..." (Wehling, 1969). In studies by Kerlinger (1967) on teacher attitudes and Coughlan (1968) on teacher work values, half to over half of all of the teachers in both studies fell into more than one category of attitude perception and value clusters often with seeming conflicting values manifested by the same person. In one of Harvey et al.'s (1968) studies concerning the conceptual systems of teachers, the "System 4" teachers (teachers characterized as having abstract beliefs) were few in number (6% of 292 subjects). In fact, other teachers (those from the next abstract level 3) had to be combined with the System 4 teachers in order to provide an adequate sample for the study of their beliefs.

This mixture of values, attitudes, and perceptions within a single individual seems to permeate many studies concerned with various components of belief systems. The pigeon-holing of these constructs is difficult and perplexing. Since the study of simple singular beliefs is so confounding, perhaps the study of "clusters of beliefs" may prove more productive.

A few of the questions which we are attempting to investigate are: How can we tell if a teacher's belief system is an intervening process between what she says and what she does? Does it make any difference in the establishment of a classroom climate if what the teacher says she does is not representative of what she actually does? Can we effectively evaluate pupil outcomes if the teacher believes what she espouses is what she does - and it isn't?

In order to determine or clarify some of the beliefs toward an open approach to teaching, in light of what I have presented, the following steps seem to be appropriate:

(1) an interview with teachers intended to determine their beliefs about certain aspects of teaching behavior

(2) systematic observation of teaching behavior within the natural school environment

(3) a synthesis of the interview data with the observation data in order to make some inferences concerning the relationship between what teachers say and what they do.

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